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Pragmatism and Inescapable Truth: Young Mongolians' Perceptions of Chinese

Caroline Olsen
SIT Study Abroad

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Pragmatism and Inescapable Truth: Young Mongolians' Perceptions of Chinese
Caroline Olsen

Academic Director: Ulzijargal Sanjaasuren
SIT Study Abroad Mongolia: Fall 2011

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to discover and seek answers about Mongolians' perceptions and feelings toward the Chinese, in particular young, university-aged Mongolians. I set out to discover what young Mongolians say about Chinese, why those attitudes came about to begin with, and if they believe that, through more numerous interactions with China, these attitudes will change.

To uncover answers, I studied previous literature that existed on Mongolians' general perceptions of Chinese, interviewed 17 students at three universities in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, released surveys to 36 university students, and interviewed professionals with various backgrounds to get finer details about the history and current situation of Mongolian and Chinese relations. What I discovered both surprised me and was what I had expected from the beginning; I had expected students to dislike Chinese, similar to older generations, but I was surprised to find that young Mongolians also had a very pragmatic approach to their relationship with Chinese. While many expressed extreme dislike, even anger at times, they also acknowledged that the Chinese are hard-working and that Mongolia should learn from China's success and rapid development. These results lead me to believe that even though feelings toward Chinese may not change, as Mongolia gets more and more connected to China, these feelings will be forced deeper into the Mongolian psyche.

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1. Introduction

While attempting to understand a culture different from your own, it is imperative to study and understand how that culture and society views its neighbors, the people and nations closest to them. In today's globalizing world, border relations are becoming ever more important for ensuring economic and political stability. For Mongolia, a developing, landlocked country with a population of only 2.7 million people, bordering a country such as China, the world's most populous country and one of the world's largest economic powers, provides a challenge politically, economically and socially. Without a friendly relationship with China, Mongolia would not only lose its largest trading and investment partner, but would also pit itself against one of the world's most powerful countries, possibly posing significant issues to its sovereignty.

Mongolia, however, has a century-long and typically unpleasant history with China, creating a unique situation for the Mongolian people. On one hand, officially Mongolia has very positive relations with China; in every day life, though, it is a well-known fact that Mongolians foster enmity towards Chinese people. In order to understand contemporary Mongolian society, it is important to understand the history between the Mongolian and Chinese people, what characterizes average feelings, how they are manifested, what it means for Chinese and Mongolian relations officially, and in what direction these attitudes could possibly take Mongolia in the near future.

After hearing for two months from various Mongolians, all of older generations, about the Mongolian people's strong negative attitudes toward Chinese people, I set out to discover what younger Mongolians think about Chinese people. Maybe younger Mongolians, university-aged to be particular, perceive Chinese people differently because they lived through the opening of the border and the democratization of Mongolia. It is possible, I thought, that young Mongolians have different attitudes about Chinese because they are not being educated under the Soviet Socialist system, are not being filled with anti-Chinese Soviet propaganda, and are getting more opportunities to come into contact with Chinese people through study. Conversely, I also felt there was a strong possibility that, because of the influence of the older generations and other everyday reflections of anti-Chinese attitudes, young Mongolians also harbor animosity towards the Chinese. I wanted to discover where young Mongolians' attitudes came from, how they differed from older generations, what reasons they cited to justify their feelings, how the attitudes are manifested in everyday life, and how, if possible, young Mongolians believed these attitudes should or could change in the future.

I carried out my study in five different universities in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, interviewing some university students and requesting others to fill out brief surveys. What I found both confirmed my creeping suspicions, that young Mongolians do not have different attitudes all that different than their parents, and surprised me. Although young Mongolians expressed an overall negative attitude regarding Chinese people, at the same time they expressed a sense of pragmatism,

a knowledge that Mongolia is reliant upon China, and the understanding that Mongolians would be better off learning from the Chinese and their successes rather than simply expressing dislike.

In order to begin understanding the problem at hand, it was necessary to read what previous researchers said and theorized about Mongolians' feelings. Similar to many other aspects of Mongolian societies and culture, this topic, specifically concerning young Mongolians, is understudied, and in order to understand Mongolian people's perceptions of Chinese further, it is necessary to conduct additional studies. As much as this topic is understudied, though, there exist very sound theories about why current attitudes toward Chinese exist, and many of these theories I found very applicable to the data I collected through my interviews and surveys with university students.

2. Background Information for Anti-Chinese Sentiment

2.1 Historical Basis

The roots of the Mongolian and Chinese conflict date back centuries, to the third century, or even before, when Mongolian nomadic tribes and the agrarian Chinese began to interact. Shortly after Chinese and Mongolians began to interact, the Qin Dynasty began constructing the Great Wall in order to keep the "barbarians" out and Chinese peasants contained¹. The Great Wall represents very specific intentions of the Chinese not only to keep out invaders, but also to keep Mongolian and Chinese cultures separate². The Great Mongol Empire

¹ Jargalsaikhan Mendee. *Anti-Chinese Attitudes in Post-Communist Mongolia: The Lingering negative Schemas of the Past*. (MA thesis. The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, 2011). Page 15.

² Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview. November 8, 2011.

(1206-1271) and the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) were main sources of the anti-Mongol attitudes that sprouted up in China and Russia. Upon the demise of the Yuan Dynasty, however, the Mongols were made vulnerable to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and directly following the Ming, the Qing Dynasty, or Manchu rule, from 1644-1911³. In 1636, the Qing took over Inner Mongolia; in 1691, they gained control over central Outer Mongolia, and finally conquered western Mongolia in 1755. Manchu rulers had very specific limitations for Chinese interactions with Mongolians: they prevented intermarriages between Han Chinese and ethnic Mongolians, restricting assimilation of the two peoples, and in addition issued a quota of the number of Chinese that could move beyond the Great Wall⁴. The Manchu further divided Mongolia into many administrative units in order to prevent unified Mongolian uprisings against Qing colonial rulers and restrict any sense of Mongolian unity or nationalism⁵.

By the early 1900s, the Qing Dynasty was in decline. The Manchu lifted restrictions on Chinese settlements in Mongolia, and instead, “aimed at integrating Mongolia, along with East Turkestan and Manchuria into China in all ways--politically, socially, culturally and economically.”⁶ In 1911, under the leadership of the Bogd Gegen, Mongolia declared its independence from the Qing Dynasty. Even by 1915, however, only Chinese suzerainty was recognized in Mongolia, and in 1919, the new nationalist government in China attempted to suppress Mongolian nationalist movements by sending military forces to

³ Mendee, 15.

⁴ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

⁵ Mendee, 16.

⁶ Mendee, 16.

Mongolia and increasing Chinese settlements in both Inner and Outer Mongolia. Mongolia declared independence for a second time in 1921, escaped the Chinese with the help of the Soviet Union, and became the first satellite communist state. Between 1921 and 1989, Mongolia would be tied to the Soviet Union, and would be heavily influenced by Soviet-Chinese relations. Between 1963 and the mid 1980s, the Mongolian-Chinese relationship “became hostile because of the negative Soviet-Chinese relationship”⁷.

The events of the 20th century, especially post-1911, “represent the strongest factor in dislike of Chinese.”⁸ In 1911, the new nationalist Chinese government viewed the collapse of the Qing Dynasty as “just a change of government, not a collapse,” meaning the Chinese government believed Mongolia was still under their rightful governance⁹. The Chinese government did not recognize Mongolia as a sovereign nation until Mao Zedong in 1946, which contributed, and actually continues to contribute, to pre-existing mistrust of the Chinese, and fears that China would try to re-swallow Mongolia at the first chance. In addition, during the 20th century Mongolia was caught in the literal middle of a “double Cold War,” one between the Soviet Union and the United States, and the other between the Soviet Union and China¹⁰. During this tumultuous period in Mongolia, it was useful for the Soviets to play along with anti-Chinese sentiments, and very convenient for Mongolian politicians to allow Soviet troops to remain in Mongolia for what they considered their own

⁷ Mendee, 16.

⁸ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

⁹ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

¹⁰ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

protection. In the 1950s, Mongolian political leaders took advantage of anti-Chinese attitudes in order “to consolidate their powers, control the society, and depict the Mongolian Communist Party and the Soviets in a positive light to the public. In doing so, they introduced only negative schemas about China and positive schemas about the Soviets and communists.”¹¹

The Soviet Union ignited a very powerful propaganda campaign against Mao during the Cultural Revolution, when Soviet-Chinese relations cooled significantly. Anti-Chinese propaganda was ubiquitous--in cinemas, newspaper, and art--and was aimed at brainwashing those who it targeted, namely Mongolians¹². Political elites

[used] all of the available assets of propaganda, education, and repressions to frame the negative schemas about China and Chinese people...China, as the main target for propaganda, was depicted as a nation with historical intentions to colonize Mongolia...and organized propaganda played a major role in portraying the evil intentions of the Chinese and the need for Soviet military protection¹³.

By 1991, after Mongolia had become a democratic nation, Mongolian-Chinese official relations normalized¹⁴.

2.2 Contemporary Mongolian-Chinese Official Relationship

Directly following democratization, political elites were uncertain about the intentions of China, which is both evident as well as carefully hidden in Mongolia’s foreign policy. Both Russia and China are declared a priority for Mongolia, yet in the case of any disagreement between the two, Mongolia will

¹¹ Mendee, 24.

¹² Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

¹³ Mendee, 26.

¹⁴ Mendee, 17.

remain neutral. Mongolia “shall not adopt the line of either country but shall maintain in principle a balanced relationship with both of them and shall promote all-round neighborly cooperation.”¹⁵ Mongolian foreign policy discusses at length Mongolia’s development based upon its own national interests and insurance of Mongolia’s sovereignty and security, ensuring that Mongolia does not have too much influence from one country,¹⁶ and the declaration of a “Third Neighbor” policy, “aimed at enabling Mongolia to avoid dependence upon its neighbors [by] strengthening its presence in the international community.”¹⁷ Despite concerns of getting too close to China, “the various Mongolian governments since 1990 have persisted in a policy of maintaining good relations and seeking even closer contacts with China.”¹⁸

In the long term for Mongolian sovereignty and security, getting too close to China is not desirable due to the fact that becoming too close would link Mongolia’s well-being too directly with China’s economic success and policies¹⁹. One can see the apprehensiveness of Mongolia’s politicians in the attempts to safeguard Mongolia against too much presence of one, or even two, particular countries, namely Russia and China, both domineering world players. China and Mongolia currently have the most official interactions; two Chinese presidents and one Chinese vice president have visited Mongolia. Each time, “Mongolian officials are quick to declare China is Mongolia’s #1 priority, and Chinese

¹⁵ Gerelzaya Batnasan, “Concepts of Mongolian Foreign Policy.” Page 3.

¹⁶ Gerelzaya Batnasan, 2.

¹⁷ Li Narangoa, “Mongolian and Preventive Democracy: Haunted by History and Becoming Cosmopolitan.” (*Asian Survey* Vol. 49, No. 2 2009). Page 365.

¹⁸ Morris Rossabi, *Modern Mongolia: From Khans to Commissars to Capitalists*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Page 232.

¹⁹ Narangoa, 367.

officials always reiterate they recognize Mongolia as a sovereign nation and they respect the government.”²⁰ These reiterations, as well as the careful construction of foreign policy to protect Mongolia’s sovereignty and ability to interact on an international level both help conceal and lay out in the open the feelings of animosity that plague the Mongolian psyche.

2.3 The Inner Mongolia Question

Whenever discussion of Mongolians’ feelings towards their neighbors arises, questions of what those feelings mean for Mongolian ethnic groups just outside of Mongolia, especially in this case Inner Mongolia, also surface. Inner Mongolians are no longer really viewed as ‘Mongolian’. They are perceived as more Chinese-- “sinicized” if you will--and many Mongolians harbor negative feelings toward Inner Mongolians²¹. While many times nationalist groups will defend Inner Mongolia, such as in the protests in May 2011, Mongolians also feel “[arrogant], [exclusive], patronizing, and condescending” towards Inner Mongolians²². It is a well-known fact that China deliberately invested in Inner Mongolia after 1990 to promote China, reinforcing Mongolians’ view that Inner Mongolians as more Chinese. Not only do Mongolians perceive Inner Mongolians as sinicized, they also use Inner Mongolia as an example of what could happen to Mongolia under too much Chinese influence, both in the economic sector and if too many Chinese laborers move to Mongolia²³. Inner Mongolia is now home to

²⁰ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

²¹ Franck Billé, “Resisting Resistance: Women and Nationalist Discourse in Mongolia.” (Lecture at ASA 2009 Conference in Bristol). Page 1.

²² Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

²³ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

more Chinese than ethnic Mongolians, and many ethnic Mongols who live in Inner Mongolia have completely lost Mongolian language and culture²⁴.

Inner Mongolian researcher Uradyn Bulag, who visited Mongolia for the first time in 1990, describes Inner Mongolian ethnic identity as “a sense of loss and a refusal to identify with a Chinese state that is largely perceived [by Inner Mongolians] to be alien.”²⁵ Bulag discusses at length his reception in Mongolia as alien to Mongolian culture. He describes how “in Mongolia, [he] realized [he] was not a ‘Mongol’, but an ‘Inner Mongol’ and a citizen of China. Worse still, [he] was sometimes regarded as Chinese.”²⁶ Bulag goes on to describe the notion of his own ‘hybridity’, part Mongolian, part Chinese, and how many Mongolians reject him for this reason. Many Mongolians perceive Inner Mongolians as spies, and look upon them with suspicion. Oftentimes Inner Mongolians serve as middlemen to the Chinese, which ‘real’ Mongols--or Outer Mongolians--view as threatening, and in turn, they insist the Inner Mongols stay in Inner Mongolia, where they are living in a miserable situation in a buffer state between Mongolia and China²⁷.

2.4 Current Theories About Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Mongolia

Many researchers share insight that there are about four or five basic reasons anti-Chinese sentiment continues to exist in contemporary Mongolia, despite normalized, even very positive official relations with China. For one thing, Mongolians fear the possibility of assimilation into China due to numerical

²⁴ D. Tsakhilgaan, Personal Interview. November 3, 2011.

²⁵ Uradyn Bulag, *Nationality and Hybridity*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). Page 2.

²⁶ Bulag, *Nationality and Hybridity*, 4.

²⁷ Ganbat Namjilsangarav, Personal Interview. November 2, 2011.

superiority of the Chinese²⁸, as well as economic dependence which could lead to political subservience to China²⁹. There is also the basis of fundamental cultural differences between Mongolians and Chinese, coming down to very basic everyday practices such as diet--a diet heavy in meat and dairy products versus a diet heavier in fruits and vegetables³⁰. Other theories of why anti-Chinese perceptions continue include the power imbalance between China and Mongolia, backlash against Chinese economic activity in Mongolia, and conflicting world views and identities³¹. Many of these theories have roots in past historical events to which Mongolians look for confirmation of their fears, and many of examples of these theories are prevalently found in my research. According to Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, there are many different layers to the Mongolian attitude about Chinese people, and there is no one large issue which enforces anti-Chinese sentiment³².

3. Methodology

The first step in my research was to read previous literature. Much of the literature I found had more to do with nationalist discourse in Mongolia, and none talked about specifically young Mongolians' perceptions of Chinese. The previous literature was very useful to read before beginning the main portion of my own research because I was able to see many of the researchers' theories of anti-Chinese sentiment at work in my own research. Reading previous literature was also helpful in establishing a solid basis of knowledge about the history

²⁸ Ganbat Namjilsangarav.

²⁹ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

³⁰ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

³¹ Mendee, 21.

³² Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

between Mongolia and China, and how that is influencing Mongolians' attitudes today.

The main method for collecting data, however, was to interview university students and have other students fill out surveys. These surveys asked the students to "Write for two minutes about their personal feelings toward Chinese people." The results I received were very enlightening about what the majority of young Mongolians think about Chinese because these short quick answers offered insight into the emotional response of the survey subjects³³. I passed out and collected surveys from 32 students attending the University of the Humanities, the National University of Mongolia, and the Mongolian University of Science and Technology. I interviewed 17 different students from three major Mongolian universities: the National University of Mongolia, Chinggis Khan University, and the Confucius Institute. All of these interviews took place in a group setting, with group sizes ranging from two students to 12. This was both a limitation and an advantage: I could not really ask students extremely in depth questions, especially in the group of 12, but on the other hand, students were able to participate in more of a discussion about their feelings, bouncing ideas and stories back and forth between each other, giving me possibly more insight through this less formal interview structure. The first question I asked every student was, "Do you know any Chinese? If so, how?" Most of the time, this was the only question I had to ask in order to get at least an idea of how the students perceived Chinese. After this initial question, students launched into their reasons and more in depth responses of their own accord, giving me the amount of information I desired.

³³ N. Galiimaa, Personal Interview. October 31, 2011.

When passing out consent forms for interview subjects to sign, I left my title as, “Young Mongolians’ Attitudes Toward the Chinese,” and the reactions I got to this title spoke volumes. All students apart from one reacted with no surprise, and were ready and willing to tell me their opinions. The interview with the group of 12 students lasted for three hours, while the others ranged between 15 and 45 minutes.

To contrast the perspectives of students, I went to Narantuul Black Market to talk to the sellers of mostly Chinese products, who have frequent interactions with Chinese people with whom they trade on a regular basis. I talked with 11 sellers, all of whom either traveled back and forth to Erlian, China (the major trading city on the border) on a regular (weekly or monthly) basis, or had relatives who traveled back and forth frequently. The sellers of Narantuul provided an interesting perspective to which I could compare the answers I received from the university students. Many of the sellers were at first reluctant to talk to me, but upon hearing I was a student, became much more open.

Because of the nature of my research topic, I faced many obstacles with which other, less sensitive topics may not have been confronted. On a personal level, I was afraid of being politically incorrect, and therefore may have had some reservations, especially at the beginning, of asking the most direct questions which would give me the clearest answers. Another obstacle was the necessity of a translator. As is always the case with translation, nuances and small details get lost, and many times the meaning of what a person was trying to say can get lost. I found this especially true while asking questions, many times realizing the way

it was translated was not exactly what I tried to ask. My status as a foreigner was also many times a disadvantage for me, as is the way with researching in non-native countries, especially considering the nature of my research questions. Because I am not Mongolian and therefore clearly not a part of the culture and society, many may have been reluctant to give me the clearest answer, or their true opinion. For many interviews I did not feel like this was the case, but one interview in particular it was obvious the subject did not want to talk to me because I am not Mongolian. Also, because I am foreign, it was much more difficult for me to understand and grasp subjects' reasons for having the attitude they did. Finally, the most major limitation to my research is the narrow group I interviewed. I, of course, did not interview any children, non-university students, or young people above the age of 25. The people I did interview, while delivering fruitful responses, provide me with only a very narrow scope of what attitudes of young Mongolians really are, and if conducting research again, it would be better to interview a wider range of young people.

I chose interviewing as the main method for collecting information because it was the only way to gather true, direct information. There is no other research that exists, to my knowledge, of young Mongolians' perceptions of Chinese, and therefore I had to go myself to collect data. I chose to hand out surveys because I thought, and was proved correct, a survey would be a quick, easy way to get basic, truthful answers from students. I also interviewed various professionals of a variety of backgrounds in an attempt to discover not only what exactly older generations' attitudes to Chinese are, but also to gauge if there was a

difference in opinion between professions. Interviewing was the best, most open way of gathering information. Not only was I able to gauge people's personal opinions and feelings through their reactions and outward emotions, I also had the opportunity to probe deeper into the students' thoughts, and get more in depth answers.

4. Interview Results

4.1 Chinggis Khan University

At Chinggis Khan University, because I only interviewed two students in a sit-down setting, I was able to ask my prepared questions, which are as follows:

1. Do you know any Chinese people?
2. What kind of characteristics do you believe Chinese people have?
3. How do your parents feel about Chinese people?
4. Where do these feelings come from?
5. Is there any time Chinese people are shown as good or nice people on TV?
(Prompted from Anonymous Student #2's answer)
6. How do you feel about nationalist/neo-Nazi groups? Do you think what they're trying to do, get rid of Chinese in Mongolia, is good or bad...?
7. How do you feel about increased Chinese migration to Mongolia?
8. What about Chinese products?
9. What do you think about China's role in Mongolia's economy?
10. How do you feel about Inner Mongolia?
11. Have either of you studied abroad?
12. What are you studying in university?

Anonymous Student #1: Female, 20 years old

1. No
2. They are bad people.
3. They don't like them.
4. (No response)
5. (No response- Subject #2's response to question 4 made question number 5 directed to her alone)
6. Oh, it's very good.
7. It's not good.
8. Very bad.
9. (No response)

10. They are not Mongolian.
11. No.
12. Accounting.

Anonymous Student #2: Female, 20 years old

1. Yes; I worked in a Chinese restaurant and my boss was Chinese. I think if we [Mongolians] treat them nicely, they'll treat us nicely, but if we treat them badly, they will not treat us kindly. When I worked hard, my boss was very nice, but if I was late or didn't work as hard, he became angry.
2. They are bad people.
3. They don't like them. My family watched the Chinese news story about the two year old girl getting hit by the car (see Appendix 1), and now we think they are very bad people. Of course, we have never liked Chinese.
4. On TV, Chinese people are always shown as bad people.
5. No. Never.
6. Oh very good.
7. Most Chinese who move to Mongolia are construction workers and they build very low-quality buildings which collapse. I saw a story on the news. They should not come.
8. We buy them because they are cheap, but they are very low, poor quality.
9. China sells us the lowest quality goods, and Chinese men are all bosses who hire Chinese. It is very bad because Mongolia has so many unemployed and Chinese are taking all the jobs.
10. They are Chinese. They have lost Mongolian language and culture, and have mixed with the Chinese. They are not Mongolian.
11. No.
12. Accounting.

The answers to my questions from Chinggis Khan are, I would consider, fairly standard responses. The first interview subject is the subject previously mentioned who was made uncomfortable by the title, "Young Mongolians' attitudes Toward Chinese." She was extremely anxious and tense throughout the entire interview (as seen by her terse answers), and did not want to talk about how she felt. The other interview subject, conversely, had much to say about her feelings and why she felt that way. One of the main points she mentioned that I feel worth discussing is the fact that she mentioned twice seeing news stories

about Chinese, and how much those stories seemed to influence her and her family's opinions. Also, she mentioned that she never sees Chinese people portrayed positively on television, which reveals one manifestation of anti-Chinese attitudes in Mongolia. The consideration of the fact that many Chinese construction workers are taking Mongolian unemployed's jobs is another interesting point in this subject's defense of her opinion. She used tangible examples taken from her everyday life in order to provide evidence of why she was correct in her dislike of Chinese, which is something especially prominent in many of the other interviews.

4.2 National University of Mongolia

At the National University, I interviewed 12 students, all students of archaeology and anthropology. This interview session was less of an interview and more of a discussion. I did not end up using my set of prepared questions; instead, I was able to simply ask if the students knew about Chinese and what their personal feelings were which consequently prompted a long, detailed discussion.

Anonymous Student # 3: Male, 20 years old

I don't like the Chinese because of the history between China and Mongolia. When I see Chinese, I become very angry, I saw a news story about Chinese construction workers injuring Mongolian workers, and that made me very angry. I hate them. My parents live in the countryside, and they have the same attitude as me. Their attitude comes from the socialist period, when there were bad feelings between the Soviet Union and China in the 1960s and 1970s.

Anonymous Student # 4: Female, 19 years old

I have never interacted with any Chinese before, but I still don't like them. The Chinese government has a secret policy through Inner Mongolia to try to attract Mongolians to live in China, so they can make all Mongolians Chinese. If

the Chinese border were to close, Mongolia couldn't survive. The Chinese have a bad attitude. My parents tell me Chinese people are talented, smart and hard-working. They see China's success and development, and tell me I should learn from them. Because we are all students of archaeology and we have to take a course on Mongolian history, we know Mongolia's and China's history and therefore our attitudes will always be negative.

Anonymous Student # 5: Female, 19 years old

I was an assistant at a construction company where there were many Chinese workers. When we passed each other we would say, "Hello," but we never interacted beyond that. The attitude Mongolians have toward Chinese has been passed down from generation to generation, and it can never change. Mongolians never like to interact with Chinese. Generally they are bad people. My parents think like me: Chinese are unpleasant and dirty. In the countryside, Chinese people bury pig's heads so pastureland becomes weak and gets destroyed. This is intentional. They also eat bugs, which is nasty.

Anonymous Student # 6: Male, 20 years old

My grandmother married a Chinese man, but her children are still Mongolian because they were born and raised in Mongolia. They have nothing to do with the Chinese. Of course, Mongolians don't like Chinese because of history. It is automatically set in Mongolians' minds that the Chinese are bad people. My parents don't like Chinese because in the 1960s and 70s, when there was a border struggle between Mongolia and China, Chinese soldiers came to Mongolia and Soviet soldiers came here to protect us. Chinese are known for attacking Mongolia.

Anonymous Student # 7: Male, 21 years old

I know Chinese people. They are physically different and have a different, pretentious attitude. Historically and in the present, the Chinese look down on Mongolia and our history, which influences Mongolians' attitudes. Mongolians' attitudes are changing because 70-80% of our products come from China. We are economically dependent upon China. In today's globalizing world, we must have good relationships, especially with the Chinese. Friendship will help us. My parents live in Gobi-Altai aimag, which borders China, and some people came from China to settle and farm there. They see the Chinese are hard-working, smart, and get rich, and say we need to learn from them. In the media, Chinese news stations only tell the good news.

Anonymous Student # 8: Male, 20 years old

In the media, television programs from China are controlled by the government, and they never show negative things about China. They always only praise progress, but a recent foreign documentary revealed the truth, the reality. In general, I hate the Chinese. They are violent and have no human rights [points to last May's protests in Inner Mongolia]. Historically the Chinese are a conquered people, but now they rule all. China is made up of many smaller nations, and China claims the successes of all those nations for its own. They use the smaller nations. When I was little, I never saw anything negative about China on TV, the negative attitude came to us naturally, no one had to tell us. I am from Hovd aimag, and my friends used to pick fights with Chinese workers. When I asked them why they said, "There's nothing else to do."

Anonymous Student # 9: Male, 21 years old

I am from the westernmost aimag, and my father is the police chief. One day there was a call from a construction company that two Chinese workers got into a knife fight. He went to investigate and I went with him. We went into their dormitory and it was very gross, like a dog's house. Their food pot was also very filthy. This has a heavy influence on Chinese reputation in Mongolia.

Anonymous Student # 10: Male, 20 years old

Nowadays, almost all Mongolians hate Chinese, but not everyone is racist. Even though we hate them, most people never hurt or fight Chinese people. Historically Mongolia and China don't get along. We are completely different nations. Mongolia is open-minded, we are nomads. Chinese are settled and close-minded. Their minds are boxed-in, and they keep their attitudes hidden. They are secretive. I don't know if China has a secret police, but they do have a secret policy in which they plan to take all Mongolia's raw materials. China is very economically developed, and they plan to take over America's economy. We shouldn't hate them but learn from them, and develop our country based on China's economic growth. Chinese are tricky.

Anonymous Student # 11: Male, 21 years old

I saw the story on the news where the two year old Chinese girl got hit by the cars (see Appendix 1). China shows limited news and we never really know what is going on (for example, AIDS in China is never discussed). China is historically large and has a long history and because it has such a large population, they can create many things. They are different from other nations; they have their own thoughts and attitudes.

Anonymous Student # 12: Female, 19 years old

The Chinese are two-sided: mentally, they are moody and greedy, but they are also hard-working. When they say they will do something, they not only do it, but also go above and beyond (for example, the Chinese Olympics). Economically, the Chinese are supportive of other Chinese businesses. I am from Erdenet, a city of young people with lots of construction, and therefore many Chinese worker-related crimes. For example, a ten year old girl was raped by Chinese workers. These crimes influence Chinese reputation in Mongolia. If Chinese workers didn't do anything bad in Mongolia, we would be okay with them.

Anonymous Student # 13: Female, 19 years old

Almost all Chinese workers in Mongolia are uneducated and rude, and do bad things here like starting fights and committing crimes and seducing Mongolian women. We cannot say that all Chinese are bad because there are so many people, they cannot all be bad. Mongolians hate the Chinese because we see the uneducated workers.

Anonymous Student # 14: Female, 19 years old

Generally I don't like them. They have done nothing wrong to me, but I still don't like them. In my home soum, there is an iron ore deposit and a Chinese mining company is there. They destroy the land and blast it with bombs and it's very loud. The locals don't like it. Mongolians who work in this mining company have a positive attitude toward Chinese. Many young women work in this company, are married to Chinese men, some have moved to China and have even already had Chinese babies. These women are uneducated, and because of their lack of education they marry Chinese.

Many of these interviews reveal both pragmatism and the inescapable truth of Mongolians' perceptions of the Chinese. As seen in many individual's answers, students both acknowledged Mongolia's need for China, China's economic prowess and development, and the fact that Chinese are hard-working. Also, multiple students pointed out that Mongolia would probably do better to try to learn from the Chinese rather than just hate them. On the other hand, these same students simultaneously expressed their own dislike of Chinese, some

expressing that Mongolians' attitude toward Chinese is simply set in Mongolians' minds, and is not changeable. Many of these students pointed to history as their reason for disliking Chinese, but also acknowledged that because they are anthropology students and were required to take a course in Chinese-Mongolian history, they knew the facts and therefore would never have a positive attitude, revealing pragmatism despite their negativity. In this discussion, similar to the interviews with the students of Chinggis Khan University, students pointed to television and news stories as well as tangible events in their everyday lives to defend their animosity. Some of these tangible events included: Chinese worker-related crimes, mining practices, and intermarriage of Mongolian women and Chinese men. There was some mention of Chinese "secret policies" towards Mongolia, and even acknowledgement that despite not knowing or ever interacting with any Chinese, there was still dislike, which reveals the knowledge that the negative attitude is not because of knowing or communicating with Chinese, it just simply exists. Interestingly, two students' parents also showed pragmatism. Anonymous Student # 4 and Anonymous Student # 7 both said their parents saw the Chinese as people from whom to learn, showing a difference in the attitude of these people from the older generation, revealing the possibility for change.

The one organized question I asked to this group of students was, "In one sentence, please tell me your personal feelings about the Chinese." The variety of answers, some more colorful than others, also provided me with reason to believe

that despite overarchingly negative attitudes, young Mongolians are also very pragmatic in their approach to their attitudes.

Anonymous Student # 3: People who want to learn from the Chinese, let them learn. People who want to hate them, let them hate. The Chinese are unlucky people; they come to Mongolia to do our dirty work.

Anonymous Student # 4: We should be aware and keep an eye on the Chinese at all times.

Anonymous Student # 5: Relatively, I hate them.

Anonymous Student # 6: Chinese are hard-working people.

Anonymous Student # 7: Because of history, I hate the Chinese. But nowadays, we need to learn from them, from their success and achievements.

Anonymous Student # 8: Chinese are sh*t.

Anonymous Student # 9: Chinese are very dirty, have polluted minds, and are greedy, moody people.

Anonymous Student # 10: Chinese people are of course bad, but we need to study and learn about them instead of hate them. We need to study Confucius.

Anonymous Student # 11: We need to learn from the Chinese.

Anonymous Student # 12: Chinese are bad.

Anonymous Student # 13: Of course we need to learn from them instead of hating them.

Anonymous Student # 14: Poor Mongolia. China is taking our stuff before our eyes. We should use China too.

4.3 Confucius Institute

I chose to interview students at the Confucius Institute because the Confucius Institute is a worldwide organization which teaches Chinese language at universities in order to promote the Chinese language internationally as well as

cultural understanding. I interviewed three students at the Confucius Institute, all of whom had been to China and expressed the desire to return to study. In this setting, I was able to ask prepared questions. These questions were:

1. What made you decide to come to the Confucius Institute?
2. How do your attitudes of Chinese differ from those of your peers?
3. How do you think Mongolians' attitudes could change?

Anonymous Student # 15: Female, 20 years old

1. I decided to come to the Confucius Institute because I went to China and when I came back [to Mongolia], I wanted to know more of the language. Maybe in the future, if my language is good enough I can go to study in China. I also wanted to learn more about Confucius and his wise teachings.
2. Before I went to China, I thought Chinese people were bad people too. But then when I was in China I met some Chinese people and talked with them. They were very kind and helpful and now I think they are very good people. When I went to China, I learned about their lifestyle, and they get up very early to exercise and work, and I think it's very good. They are very hard-working people.
3. China's economy is growing day by day, and more Mongolians will have to learn Chinese in order to do business. When I was a little girl, everyone was saying, "You must learn English." But now just 5-10 years later, everyone is saying, "You must learn Chinese." I think by learning Chinese language and culture, Mongolians' attitudes will change.

Anonymous Student # 16: Male, 21 years old

1. I wanted to learn Chinese language so I can go to study in China.
2. Mongolians only see the bad side of Chinese. Of course, you know everyone has two sides, good and bad. China has a very large population, so of course there are good and bad people. I think Chinese are mostly good, though. They are very hard-working and kind.
3. Politics. When you pass by construction sites you can see many workers, all Chinese. The Chinese workers are taking many Mongolian jobs. Many poor Mongolians are unemployed, and they hate the Chinese for taking their jobs. Politics can change this.

Anonymous Student # 17: Male, 20 years old

1. Before I went to China, my Chinese language was very bad. Then I went to China for one year to study. My Chinese language got a little bit better, but I decided to come to the Confucius Institute to make it better.
2. I like the Chinese very much. Their lifestyle is very good, and I want to make my lifestyle like theirs.
3. I'm not sure.

The Confucius Institute proved to me one of my major hypotheses: I hypothesized that the more contact with Chinese people a person had, the more positive thoughts they would exhibit. None of these students, who had both spent time in China and are in the process of learning the Chinese language, expressed negativity about Chinese. Even upon mention of Chinese workers in Mongolia, Anonymous Student # 16 did not say anything about worker-related crimes, or attempt to vilify the workers at all. Instead, he merely noted “there are good and bad people,” because of the large population³⁴. The most telling piece of evidence was what Anonymous Student # 15 described to me: she told me, “Before I went to China, I thought Chinese people were bad people too,” which goes to show that her interactions with Chinese have heavily influenced her opinion³⁵.

4.4 Narantuul Sellers

The same cannot necessarily be said about the sellers of Narantuul, however, who despite their arguably constant interactions with Chinese still had a generally negative attitude. I asked 11 sellers at Narantuul Black Market generally the same 2 or 3 questions, which were,

1. How often do you go to China?
2. Do you interact with Chinese?
3. What are these interactions like?

Many sellers went to China weekly, others multiple times a month, and one seller went only twice per year. The sellers who did no traveling to China had a relative who traveled in their stead, or bought their goods from a trader who traveled back

³⁴ Anonymous Student #16, Personal Interview. November 17, 2011.

³⁵ Anonymous Student #15. Personal Interview. November 17, 2011.

and forth on a weekly or biweekly basis. All of the sellers or their relatives traveled to Erlian, China, a large trading border city to buy their goods. The sellers all said they interacted with Chinese only to trade and do business, and had no relationship with them outside of this. The most frequent responses I got to my questions about what these interactions are like (this question got morphed into “Tell me your opinion of Chinese.”) were along the lines of “Chinese people are greedy, and have a negative attitude,”³⁶ and “Chinese are snobby and moody.”³⁷ Two sellers told me that they are fine with Chinese people, and two sellers told me they did not have an opinion about Chinese people because they did not travel to China³⁸. One seller who told me that he is okay with Chinese people was interrupted by a woman listening in on our conversation who told me, “Chinese are moody, aggressive people.”³⁹

Interestingly, about halfway through my trip in Narantuul and my discussions with sellers, I realized that the sellers were drawing no distinction between Chinese and Inner Mongolians. Narantuul Seller # 6 pointed me toward someone she called, “a Chinese seller,” who in fact turned out to be Inner Mongolian. This woman, Narantuul Seller # 7, told me she has been trading in Mongolia for close to 10 years, it has been alright, and that her husband travels back and forth to collect goods, namely clothing, to sell. This example of a lack of division between Chinese and Inner Mongolians proves Bulag’s sorrowful theory that Inner Mongolians are now becoming increasingly more known to the

³⁶ Narantuul Seller #2, Personal Interview. November 3, 2011.

³⁷ Narantuul Seller #11, Personal Interview. November 3, 2011.

³⁸ These are two sellers who had relatives travel in their stead.

³⁹ Narantuul Seller #4, Personal Interview. November 3, 2011.

Outer Mongols as ‘Chinese’⁴⁰. Not only are Inner Mongols classified as Chinese, but one woman also told me, “Chinese are better than Inner Mongolians.”⁴¹ This declaration, albeit unexpected, was something I found quite surprising. Not only did this woman classify Inner Mongolians as below her, she classified them as below Chinese after telling me, “the Chinese are moody, snobby and aggressive.”⁴² She applied these qualities also to Inner Mongolians. The Narantuul Black Market sellers provided a sound basis for opinions which were not in the scope of my more focused research questions from which to analyze interviews and surveys with university students.

4.5 Survey Results

As previously mentioned, I handed out surveys to 32 university students studying at the National University of Mongolia, the Mongolian University of Science and Technology, and the University of the Humanities. 27 students expressed their dislike for the Chinese. Only 5 students expressed that they were either okay with the Chinese, they appreciated their hardworking nature and praised their development, or that the Chinese are “not too bad.”⁴³ The students who do not like the Chinese used reasons such as, “They are evil-minded and rude,” “They are selfish,” “Chinese are two-faced,” and, “Chinese are bad people.”⁴⁴ Many simply said their dislike of the Chinese is “in their blood.” Many also noted, however, that the Chinese are hard-working, even when they had negative views as a whole toward Chinese. Several students also noted that

⁴⁰ Bulag, *Nationality and Hybridity*, 4.

⁴¹ Narantuul Seller #8, Personal Interview. November 3, 2011.

⁴² Narantuul Seller #8.

⁴³ Olsen Survey, November 11, 2011.

⁴⁴ Olsen Survey.

China has such a large population that not all Chinese people could be bad. One student claimed, “they are evil-minded. They don’t care about others. But I hope most of them are different.”⁴⁵

The admittance that the Chinese are hard-working and have a great developing country is one example of pragmatism. One student noted, “Chinese are our neighbors forever. We shouldn’t hate and imprecate them. Instead of that we should learn from them. There isn’t a bad nation. But there are bad people in the world.”⁴⁶ This student did not say whether she liked or disliked Chinese, instead she simply said Mongolians should just learn from them. This sense of pragmatism is evident in much of the data I collected. The acceptance that even though their attitudes were based upon animosity, China is still a successful, rapidly developing country with hard-working people who perform above and beyond from which Mongolia would do best to learn reveals a certain amount of realism that surpasses personal feelings.

5. Manifestations of Anti-Chinese Attitudes

5.1 The Media

Anti-Chinese attitudes in the media are a very frequent occurrence, especially in non-mainstream newspapers and in tabloids, much of the time about the poor-quality goods from China, other times having to do with the interbreeding of Chinese and Mongolians. Many news reports crop up about harmful, poisoned vegetables, which “are not harmful because China is not adhering to good farming practices, they are harmful because the Chinese

⁴⁵ Olsen Survey.

⁴⁶ Olsen Survey, November 7, 2011.

government is *trying* to poison Mongols and lead them to extinction.”⁴⁷ These sorts of ideas do not exist merely about food from China, but also food considered Chinese, such as fruits and vegetables, neither of which are native nor traditional to Mongolia⁴⁸.

The recent news story, “Хятадын хүчнийхэн хоорондоо зодолджээ,”⁴⁹ from the Daily Post newspaper published on October 10, 2011 covers an incidence in China in which fighting took place between police officers and soldiers. The author outlines the attack, claiming “ordinary people who were passing by” were attacked, giving immediate negative connotations. The author goes on to describe how the Chinese “fought like real men,” and says, “If you value your enemies, and prepare yourself more than anyone else then you can beat your enemy.”⁵⁰ Dash also infers that there must be a “State Policy [in China] regarding doing physical exercise like armies to prepare their minds” for fighting⁵¹. Later in the article, the author discusses briefly the history between China and Mongolia, describing Mongolia as “wolves in history,” and if Mongolia became wolves once again, they could reclaim their place as the “predators” of society, positioned at the top of the world as during the Great Mongol Empire⁵².

5.2 Music

In contemporary Mongolian music, at least in one song, there are strong examples of anti-Chinese attitudes. The band, Dorvon Zuug, is a hip-hop rap

⁴⁷ Franck Billé, “Faced with Extinction: Myths and Urban Legends in Contemporary Mongolia” (*Cambridge Anthropology* Vol. 28, No.1 2008/2009). Page 8.

⁴⁸ Billé, “Faced with Extinction: Myths and Urban Legends in Contemporary Mongolia,” 8.

⁴⁹ J. Dash, “Хятадын хүчнийхэн хоорондоо зодолджээ.” (*Daily Post*, 10 Oct 2011). <http://world.news.mn/content/83579.shtml>

⁵⁰ J. Dash, 1.

⁵¹ J. Dash, 1.

⁵² J. Dash, 1.

group with a song called, “Buu Davar Hujaa Naraa,”⁵³ in which they discuss at length how they feel about Chinese. Some lines of this song include, “If possible, we all wish to shoot and destroy them all,” and “shame on Mongols, awaken up and strengthen yourselves.” While this song is extremely hard to understand because it is rap, but the music video speaks volumes as well. In the video, posted on YouTube, the band is shown making shooting motions, and when the Mongolian word for Chinese, “hyatad,” pops up on the screen, one band member punches and shatters it. Not all manifestations of attitudes toward Chinese are this blatant, but this represents a faction of Mongolian attitudes which are definitely extreme.

It is obvious, though, from reading the comments posted below the video that this band has some Mongolians who agree with their thoughts. The very first comment posted about the video is, “f**k all that people who is protecting china if you be in theyr side we will kill you with them !!!!!!!,” and the second reads, “F**k da motherf**kin china and them f**kin chinese. Ta nar chadhuu manaihiig ezelj????? Can you take our land????? hahahahaha.”⁵⁴ Most people who use the internet to watch YouTube videos are not extremist adults, but regular young people⁵⁵. While these young people may not act upon these particular feelings in their everyday lives, they obviously feel in some part of their minds that Dorvon Zuug is right.

⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqCWLLIAZVI>

⁵⁴ Dorvon Zug, “Buu Davar Hujaa Naraa.” (*YouTube*, Guulii, 5 July 2006).

⁵⁵ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

5.3 Nationalist Groups

Recently in Western media, more and more coverage has been devoted to the neo-Nazi groups in Mongolia, although these groups are mainly fringe groups without all that much power in society⁵⁶. These neo-Nazi groups occasionally carry out the burning of signs with Chinese characters on them, and write graffiti on the walls of buildings to spread their message⁵⁷. In March 2007, nationalist groups made a new rule about signs in Mongolia, which stated that Mongolian text had to take precedence over foreign scripts. The nationalist groups proceeded to burn the signs of businesses that did not comply with their rule, sending a clear message that foreign influence, especially Chinese influence, is not welcome in Mongolia⁵⁸. These neo-Nazi groups represent the most extreme Mongolian feelings, though, and on more personal levels, Mongolians do not exhibit their feelings as forwardly as these groups. Neo-Nazi groups' agendas are evolving currently from personal attacks on Chinese to developing a definition for Mongolian national identity, one that would make it more difficult to be excepted as Mongolian without fitting certain criteria imposed by the neo-Nazi groups⁵⁹.

5.4 Intermarriages of Chinese Men and Mongolian Women

Coupled with the fear of assimilation into Chinese culture is the fear of "interbreeding," which could result in a greater number of Chinese people in Mongolia, and therefore result in a decreased number of Mongolians with "pure

⁵⁶ Wasserman, James. "The Neo Nazis of Mongolia: Swastikas Against China." *Time Magazine*. 27 July 2009: 1. Web. 14 Nov 2011.

<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1910893,00.html>>

⁵⁷ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

⁵⁸ Billé, "Faced with Extinction: Myths and Urban Legends in Contemporary Mongolia," 5.

⁵⁹ Ganbat Namjilsangarav.

blood.”⁶⁰ As seen a couple of times in interviews and survey data above, there is a growing number of Mongolian women who enter relationships with Chinese men. One interview subject named the reason for these intermarriages as the uneducatedness of the Mongolian women, while other explanations are also commonly offered⁶¹.

Some other justifications include, “women...are victims of Chinese scheming tactics,” “women who enter into these relationships are naive,” and Mongolian women are being actively seduced by Chinese men in order to finish the Mongolian race, and so China can absorb Mongolia as it has always wanted⁶². In August of 2007, “the nationalist group Dayar Mongol issued a statement warning that they would shave off the hair of women having sexual relations with Chinese men.”⁶³ Most Mongolians actively oppose intermarriage because it is seen as the woman’s “social responsibility” to continue the Mongolian race, and by mixing with Chinese, women are only giving China more of a chance to re-swallow Mongolia⁶⁴.

5.5 Other Reactions Against Chinese in Everyday Life

In daily life, displays of anti-Chinese sentiment in Mongolia are relatively few compared to ethnic clashes in other Asian countries. Chinese workers, people and businesses are occasionally harassed, and sometimes when standing in a group, they are yelled at or get things thrown at them⁶⁵. The use of derogatory

⁶⁰ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

⁶¹ Anonymous Student #12. Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁶² Billé, “Faced With Extinction: Myths and Urban Legends in Contemporary Mongolia,” 11.

⁶³ Franck Billé, “Different Shades of Blue: Gay Men and Nationalist Discourse in Mongolia.” (*Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* Vol. 10, No. 2, 2010). Page 191.

⁶⁴ Billé, “Faced with Extinction: Myths and Urban Legends in Contemporary Mongolia,” 10.

⁶⁵ Ganbat Namjilsangarav.

terms “huaqiao” (in Mongolian “hujaa”), “danjaad,” “luhaan,” “hyatadiin,” and “erliiz,” all terms coined during the Cold War are now used in public to belittle the Chinese or anyone connected to the Chinese in any way. Now, most of these comments are found online, as seen above⁶⁶. Other ways people reveal their convictions about Chinese people are by graffitiing messages onto walls of buildings, spray painting the windows of Chinese businesses and restaurants, as well as burning signs with Chinese characters on them⁶⁷. Mongolians have “an allergy to character writing,” and therefore sometimes take down and smash or burn signs with Chinese characters on them⁶⁸.

One of the most devastating impacts on a politician’s campaign is to be connected to the Chinese in anyway, through business, family ties, etc. Often times during campaigns, politicians will use smear tactics on their opponents in which they tie them to Chinese. These tactics often prove detrimental, and result in the politician with Chinese ties not getting elected⁶⁹. Another way people manifest their feelings about Chinese is by spreading word of secret Chinese government policies and programs, such as the secret Chinese policy to seduce and breed with Mongolian women. Other policies along the same vein include the Chinese policy directed at purchasing all of Mongolia’s raw materials-- including meat-- trying to starve the Mongolians⁷⁰. There is also rumor of the Chinese government trying to attract Mongolians to live in China in order to, once

⁶⁶ Mendee, 32.

⁶⁷ Ganbat Namjilsangarav.

⁶⁸ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

⁶⁹ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

⁷⁰ Ganbat Namjilsangarav.

again, assimilate the Mongolian people and rid the world of Mongolians⁷¹. Ideas along these lines are prevalent in Mongolian society, and only help to explain the anti-Chinese perceptions in Mongolia.

6. Discussion and Analysis

There is a clear duality present in young Mongolians' perceptions of Chinese people. On one hand, there is clearly prevalent animosity toward Chinese people: their products, their economic dominance, their actions in Mongolia. Contrarily, young Mongolians tend to show a pragmatic approach to China as a country as well as the Chinese people. Young Mongolians recognize China's economic success, the fact that not everyone in China has an evil mind, the knowledge that China and Mongolia's rocky history has much to do with current opinions about the Chinese, and that Mongolia would probably do well to learn from China's successes. The animosity present in young voices draws parallels to many of the theories presented by researchers who have studied this topic in Mongolia. The pragmatism these young voices expressed, however, is something that is not addressed in the current theories, and is something that should be further dissected.

6.1 Young Mongolians and Hostility Towards Chinese

The vast majority of the students I interviewed said something about their dislike of the Chinese. These attitudes stem from years and years of anti-Chinese attitude, as well as influences from the media, parents, and current fears. "I have never interacted with any Chinese before, but I still don't like them. The Chinese

⁷¹ Anonymous Student #2, Personal Interview. November 10, 2011.

have a bad attitude.”⁷² Even though this student did not know any Chinese and had never actually spoken to a Chinese person in her life, she still had a negative attitude about Chinese people. This attitude tended to be indicative of the majority of students I spoke with; most had never met, spoken with, or known a Chinese person, and yet they still harbored extremely negative perceptions. More than one student claimed “The attitude Mongolians have toward Chinese has been passed down from generation to generation, and it can never change,”⁷³ and told me that nothing had to be told to them about Chinese people, they just knew they were bad⁷⁴. This seems to be the inescapable truth about contemporary Mongolian society.

Most of the students cited historical reasons as their basis for disliking the Chinese. They cited China and Mongolia’s tormented history, and how China has never treated Mongolia with the kindness or respect it deserves. The students never pointed me toward one example, but merely said, “history,” when asked why they felt the way they did. Other students supported their perceptions with evidence pulled from their everyday life experiences, such as the student who went with his father to investigate the knife fight between Chinese workers and ended up finding the workers’ filthy dormitory⁷⁵, or the student who told about the rape of a ten year old girl in Erdenet by Chinese workers⁷⁶. It did not matter to these students that they had no personal experience, they used things they had seen or heard about on the streets, from their parents, in the news or from some

⁷² Anonymous Student #4, Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁷³ Anonymous Student #5, Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁷⁴ Anonymous Student #8, Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁷⁵ Anonymous Student #9, Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁷⁶ Anonymous Student #12.

other source to support their animosity. “They have done nothing wrong to me, but I still don’t like them.”⁷⁷ Without a doubt, this is the unavoidable situation in Mongolian society: an enormous amount of dislike for a people backed up not by relationships, but by stories and the influence of peers and elders.

6.2 Theories Applied

“The two largest fears of Mongolians are a fear of assimilation into China, and a fear of economic dependence upon China.”⁷⁸ Although other theories do exist, these tend to be the most prevalent theories for anti-Chinese attitudes, and cropped up multiple times during interviews. For example, the telling of China’s secret policies to make China look more appealing to Mongolia so Mongolians would want to become Chinese, allowing China to re-swallow Mongolia⁷⁹. Classified under the fear of assimilation is the hatred of Mongolian women-Chinese men relationships, and the idea that China has another secret policy devoted to having Chinese men migrate to Mongolia to seduce the women and turn Mongolia into a Chinese nation through offspring. The fear of economic dependence is revealed in answers such as “[China]...has a secret policy in which they plan to take all Mongolia’s raw materials.”⁸⁰ If such a policy did exist, it would result in Mongolia’s complete dependence upon China for all of its needs, and culminate in Mongolia’s political subservience to China⁸¹. Students said outright that Mongolia is economically dependent upon China, a fact that obviously did not improve their attitudes about the Chinese.

⁷⁷ Anonymous Student #14, Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁷⁸ Ganbat Namjilsangarav.

⁷⁹ Anonymous Student #4.

⁸⁰ Anonymous Student #10, Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁸¹ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

Other theories proffered by researchers to explain anti-Chinese perceptions include a power imbalance between China and Mongolia, backlash against Chinese economic activity coupled with current aggressive Chinese economic policies⁸², and the refusal of the Chinese for many years, and sometimes still today, to recognize Mongolia as a sovereign nation, still completely independent upon China⁸³. The existing power imbalance between China and Mongolia ties directly with the fear of economic dependence and political subservience. If China continues to get more and more powerful while Mongolia continues to be economically dependent, Mongolians feel that their future as an independent, democratic nation could be in jeopardy. The same goes for current aggressive Chinese economic policies and the backlash against Chinese economic activity. If China's economy continues to grow with Mongolia so directly linked to its success, it could result in political subservience and eventually complete assimilation into China. Mongolians are proud of their status as a young democratic country, and to have that status taken away, especially by the Chinese who have long been their adversaries, would be a major blow. Because of these theories and reasons for anti-Chinese attitudes, it becomes much easier to understand the inescapable facts of how Mongolians, including most young Mongolians, feel toward Chinese.

6.3 Bridging the Gap: Pragmatism in the Midst of the Reality

Anti-Chinese attitudes are rampant in young Mongolians' feelings toward Chinese. But coupled with that is something heretofore un-noted by many

⁸² Mendee, 21.

⁸³ Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Personal Interview.

researchers: young people also have a sense of clarity about the reality of the Mongolians current situation with the Chinese. As one student put it, “Because of history, I hate the Chinese. But nowadays, we need to learn from them, from their success and achievements.”⁸⁴ Despite his strong negative feelings about Chinese, this student acknowledged that instead of simply hating the Chinese, Mongolia would be better off learning from their economic successes, taking them into account and applying them to Mongolia so Mongolia, too, can become an international economic player. Another student said Mongolia should “develop...based on China’s economic growth,” suggesting that maybe instead of simply being resentful of dependence upon China, Mongolia should take advantage of it and use it in order to become economically successful internationally⁸⁵.

Other students, in both surveys and in interviews, noted that because China’s population is so large, there is no way every Chinese person can be bad. It was also mentioned that Mongolians’ attitudes are influenced greatly by Chinese workers in Mongolia, who are “uneducated and rude.”⁸⁶ Another said “If Chinese workers didn’t do anything bad in Mongolia, we would be okay with them.”⁸⁷ The acknowledgement that Mongolians base at least part of their attitudes upon the actions and stories of Chinese workers, and these workers should not be representative of all Chinese is a very practical, realistic realization. This did not stop the students from disliking the Chinese, but it is an

⁸⁴ Anonymous Student #7, Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁸⁵ Anonymous Student #10.

⁸⁶ Anonymous Student #13, Personal Interview. November 11, 2011.

⁸⁷ Anonymous Student #12.

acknowledgement that unveils a certain amount of clarity. A multitude of students, both interviewed and surveyed, said something about the hard-working nature of Chinese, which also shows pragmatism in that the students realized something positive about Chinese characters, hinting at the fact that maybe they did not believe they were all bad, and maybe had some redeemable qualities. The majority of students showed a realistic approach to their feelings toward Chinese, a phenomenon that may not necessarily be true for older generations, at least one that is not noted in previous research on this topic. Finally, the students of the Confucius Institute revealed that a positive attitude towards Chinese is possible, all of them desiring to travel to China, and one is particular noting that the more Mongolians had to come into contact with Chinese people, meet them and learn about them, the more positive Mongolian attitudes would become⁸⁸

7. Conclusion

Young Mongolians offer an interesting take on modern Mongolian society. One voice in their attitudes dates back generations; a dislike that has plagued Chinese-Mongolian relations for hundreds of years. The other voice can be heard as a product of modern society, of post-democratic revolution Mongolia. This is the voice that tells young Mongolians that despite their fears and animosity, Mongolia, at this point in time, is dependent upon China, and China is not likely to stop growing in the near future. Layers of history coupled with negativity in the media, paranoid tales of secret Chinese policies, fears of assimilation and economic dependence, and observations from daily life add together to form the negative perceptions of Chinese today as well as the

⁸⁸ Anonymous Student #15.

pragmatic approach many young Mongolians take. Young Mongolians are forced to add a pragmatic approach in order to allow Mongolia to continue to exist and grow in today's globalizing world. With the goal of discovering what young Mongolians' attitudes are, where they come from, how they are manifested and what could become of Mongolia's future based upon these attitudes, I discovered something extremely enticing about Mongolia's younger generation, the generation that soon take over Mongolia's growing democracy.

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Appendix I

On October 17, 2011, Michael Bristow, a reporter for the British Broadcasting Corporation, reported from Beijing about a two-year-old girl who got hit by a car, then a few minutes later was hit by another car. International outcry arose because the girl was left in the street, passed by numerous people before she was picked up by a garbage man who was subsequently called a hero. The girl died in the hospital a few days later. The accident was caught on video by an anonymous person, and widely circulated the web within hours. Many students used this story as an example of the bad character of Chinese people.